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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0114
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STATE DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN

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TAGS: PREL PGOV TI

SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN: WIDESPREAD DISSENT, BUT DIFFERENT PROGNOSSES FOR THE FUTURE

REF: DUSHANBE 635

Classified By: Ambassador Tracey A. Jacobson for reasons 1.4 (b) AND (d)

¶11. (C) Summary: A recent visit by an INR analyst to assess Tajikistan's political situation found media, business, and religious figures increasingly willing to bluntly criticize President Rahmon, but also found a lack of consensus on when or whether rising discontent with his administration will translate into political instability. End Summary.

¶12. (C) From May 12-15, David Abramson, from the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, came to Tajikistan to assess Tajikistan's political stability. Abramson and EmbOffs met with journalists, political analysts, religious figures, and businesspeople in Dushanbe and Kulyab.

Clicking Their Heels and Hoping For Something Better

¶12. (C) Our interlocutors all said that the vast majority of people in Tajikistan were deeply disaffected, and that they had lost all confidence that the Government could turn the economy around. Journalists and political analysts predicted deepening crises in the banking and agriculture sectors. Abduvohid Shomolov, a researcher on corruption at the Strategic Research Center, a government think tank, gave numerous reasons why Tajikistan had further to fall: the "psychological degradation" of the Tajik public; increasingly blatant corruption; lack of competent government officials; bad leadership.

¶13. (C) Mehmonsho Sharifov, a political analyst in Dushanbe, predicted that the country's dire situation would soon provoke conflict, saying to us that "something simply has to happen soon." When pressed, however, he could not identify a way in which change would come about. The political opposition has been neutralized and ineffective; people choose to voice their opposition by leaving for Russia or elsewhere; fears of reigniting the tension that caused the civil war remain a disincentive to publicly expressing dissent.

Outside Influences

¶14. (C) Abdullo Rahnamo, a highly regarded expert at the Strategic Research Center, spoke to us about religious

influences. He downplayed the religious aspects of Tajikistan's deepening relationship with Iran, focusing on "natural" historical and cultural ties; despite Sunni-Shiite differences, Tajiks are simply curious about Iran. He said that Tajikistan has been drawn closer to Iran out of economic necessity, and because of Uzbekistan's relationship with Russia, but he emphasized that "we are not taking their religious route." Iran itself recognized the need to shift away from promoting religious principles to cultivating more secular cultural and educational ties.

¶ 15. (C) On the other side of the religious spectrum, Hoji Mirzo, an eminent imam at a Friday mosque in Kulyab, said that the Salafis were a "dangerous group that can cause splits among young Tajiks." The actual influence of the group, however, is debatable. Rahnamo classified them as a fringe group with little following; he added that the authorities use the specter of Salafi-inspired radicalism to justify aspects of their restrictive religious policies. None of our sources had comprehensive information about the source of the Salafis' financing.
Qsource of the Salafis' financing.

The Insiders

¶ 16. (SBU) Our sources referred to power struggles within President Rahmon's inner circle, but they pointed out that the inner circle is so small that very few people fully understood the dynamics of the Rahmon family relationships. There appears to be a rivalry between President Rahmon's children, especially his daughter Tahmina, and his brother in law, Hasan Asadullzoda. (Note: This rivalry manifested

itself in early May, when rumors spread that President Rahmon's son, Rustam, reportedly shot Asadullzoda (reftel)).

¶ 17. (C) Zaid Saidov, a businessman and former Minister of Industry, knows Asadullzoda well because of his prior government service and business connections. While Asadullzoda is sometimes identified as a pragmatic influence in President Rahmon's administration, Saidov said that Asadullzoda's primary aim is to "control everything for himself." He could not shed light on whether Asadullzoda was a legitimate contender to succeed Rahmon, but Saidov did comment about his undue influence over Tajikistan's economic resources.

¶ 18. (SBU) Our sources also commented on Rahmon's rivalry with the Dushanbe Mayor, Makhmadsaid Ubaidulloev. The two circles of power do not intersect; each has carved out its fiefdom. Our sources found it curious that President Rahmon has been unable to unseat Ubaidulloev from either of his powerful positions) Mayor of Dushanbe or Speaker of the upper house of Parliament.

¶ 19. (SBU) Popular discontent fuels speculation and rumor about these "insiders." The Rumors that President Rahmon's son, Rustam, shot and killed Asadullzoda persist weeks after the alleged event, despite the fact that Asadullzoda has been seen numerous times in public and has met with diplomats. Separating fact from fiction, or from wishful thinking, has become difficult.

What to Make of This

¶ 10. (C) Comment: Our meetings did not uncover a specific near-term threat to political stability amidst a decaying economic situation. The degree and tone of public criticism is sharper than in previous years, and unlike in the past, the criticism is often directed at President Rahmon. It is unlikely, however, that Tajiks will soon translate their discontent into a grassroots movement for change. Labor migration serves both as an economic lifeline and a political safety valve for the country's poorest communities. Similarly, while young Tajiks continue to flock to mosques, religion is unlikely to become a force for political change

in the next year. Rivalries among Tajikistan's political elite are more likely to cause instability in the near term than popular discontent.

¶11. (C) Comment continued: Time will change this set of circumstances. Younger generations are less fearful of igniting the tensions that led their parents to engage in war. Part of the country's stability is based on the perception that the government maintains tight control over the population. If this perception seriously weakens, there is a chance for popular dissatisfaction to turn ugly. End Comment.

JACOBSON